Evaluation of Unintended Consequences of Development: Building Evaluation Capacity in Support of Development and Democracy

U.S. Department of State Fourth Annual Conference on Program Evaluation
June 7-8, 2011
George C. Marshall Center

Scope of Presentation

TOPIC: Relationship between development and democracy

THEME: Evaluating the relationship requires dealing with unexpected outcomes

METHOD:
- Construct a simplified illustrative example
- Work through the evaluation of surprise issues

DISCLAIMER: In 45 minutes we will ignore some important issues and skip details

Part 1: The Example

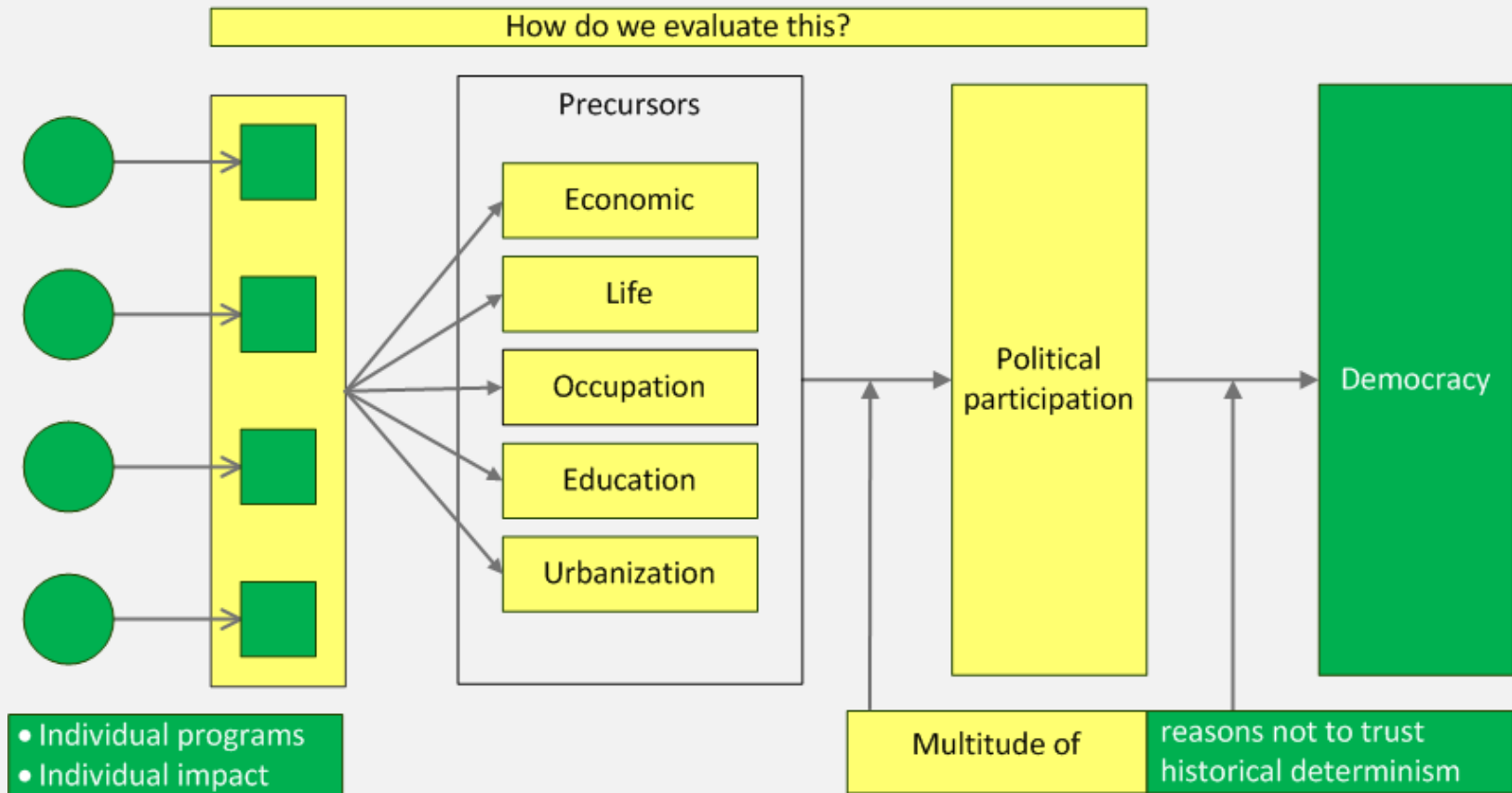## Evaluating the Relationship Between a Portfolio of Development Programs and Democracy

Scope of the Evaluation Example

We already know how to evaluate individual programs. We can't assess impact on democracy:
1) Time scale,
2) Non-linearity of change

We can:
1) Evaluate collective impact of programs on development
2) Work to a theory of the relationship between development and democracy

How do we evaluate this?

Precursors

- Economic
- Life
- Occupation
- Education
- Urbanization

Political participation

Democracy

- Individual programs
- Individual impact

Multitude of   reasons not to trust historical determinism

Program Theory

The good news, however, is that the conditions conducive to democracy can and do emerge—and the process of "modernization," according to abundant empirical evidence, advances them.

Modernization is a syndrome of social changes linked to industrialization. Once set in motion, it tends to penetrate all aspects of life, bringing occupational specialization, urbanization, rising educational levels, rising life expectancy, and rapid economic growth.
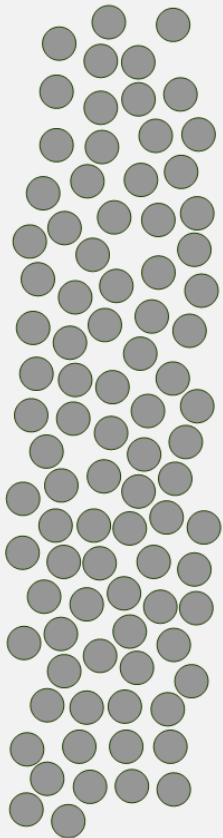
These create a self-reinforcing process that transforms social life and political institutions, bringing rising mass participation in politics and—in the long run—making the establishment of democratic political institutions increasingly likely.*
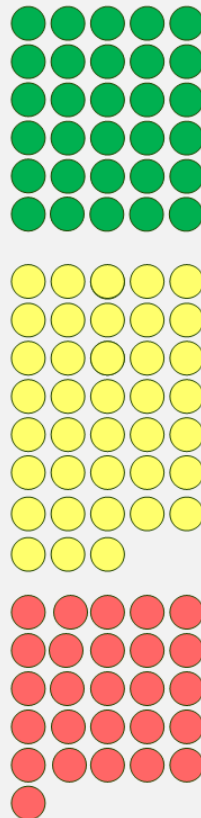
What would the evaluation look like?

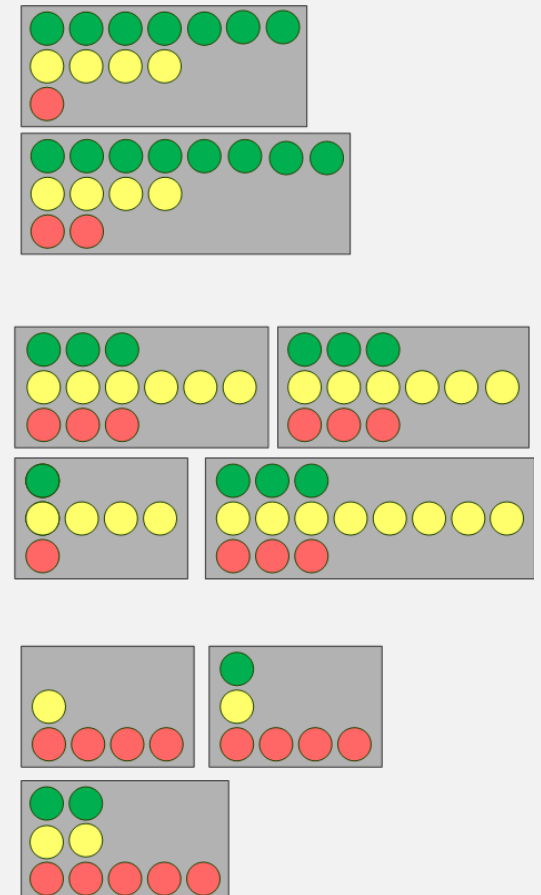## *Define the Sample*

1 **Find development programs**

2 **Group by likelihood of success**
- Successful implementation
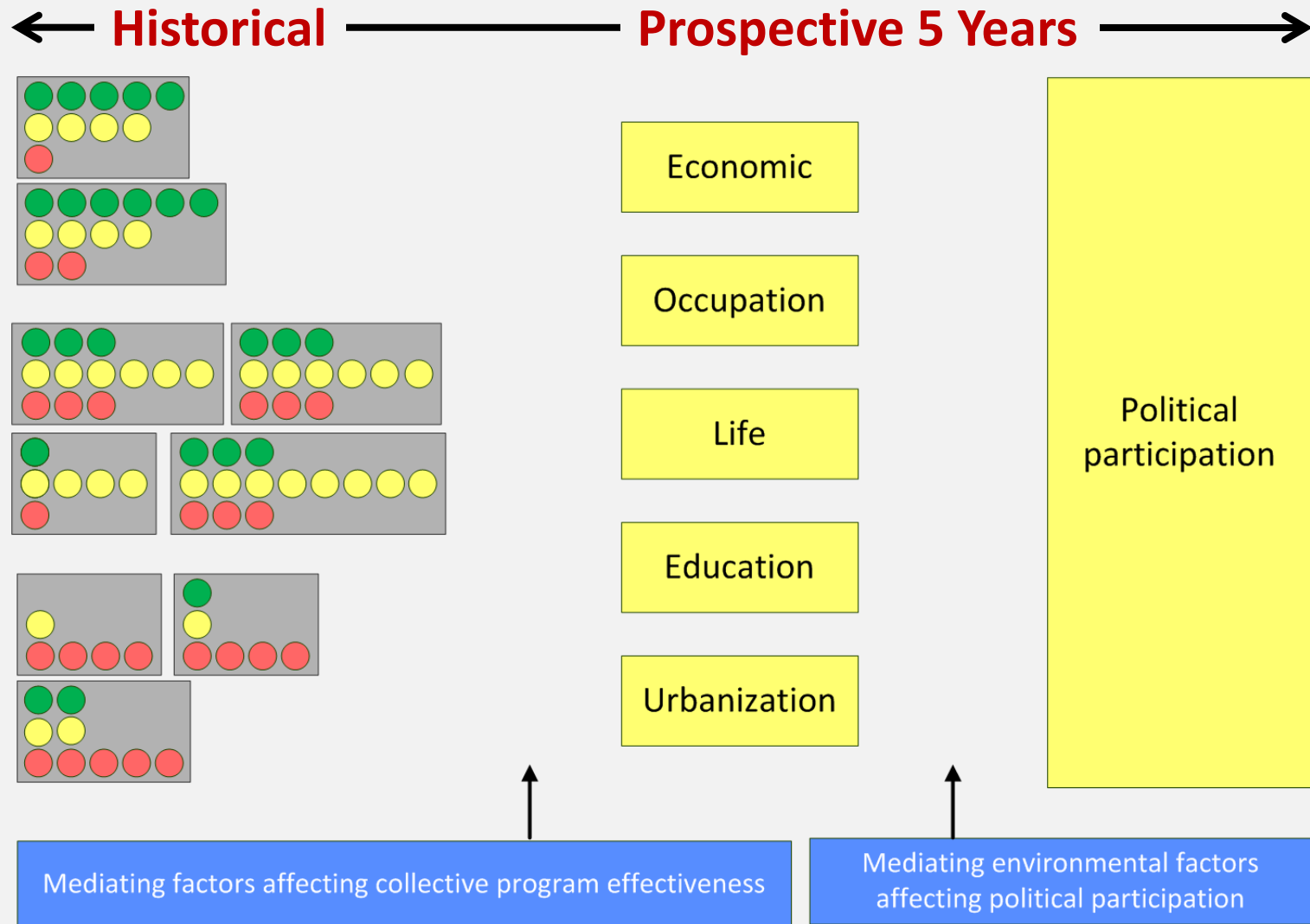- Operating for at least 1 year
- Impact demonstrated

3 **Group by geographical area and clusters of areas to compare impact**

What would the evaluation look like?

Date & Time Frame

Part 2: Exploring the Example

Where are the unintended consequences?
How do they affect evaluation?
What to do about them?

Why is my example problematic?

Program behavior

- It does not account for unpredictable change over time
- It does not include many "side effect" outcomes that may occur
- It does not account for potential surprises in executing the evaluation

Evaluation behavior

- Flexible design can deal with these problems, but flexibility reduces design choice.
- Good evaluation needs designs whose integrity is maintained over time.

Organizing a Response

3 Frameworks

Continuum of surprise from foreseeable to impossible to anticipate

Relationship of program and evaluation life cycles

Social/organizational map of sources of surprise

18 Case Studies

Eclectic methods – evaluation, planning, other social science
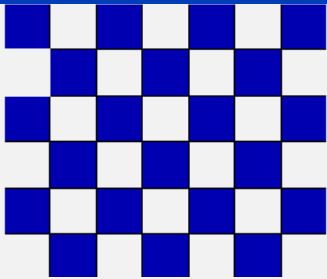
Methods are well known

Need to think of them systematically, as part of an overall approach

All we can do today is illustrate a small piece of the method

Framework 1: Continuum of Surprise

Foreseeable

Unforeseeable

Respect Data.   *Trust judgment.*

Theory

Limiting time frames

Exploiting past experience

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Forecasting & program monitoring

System based logic modeling

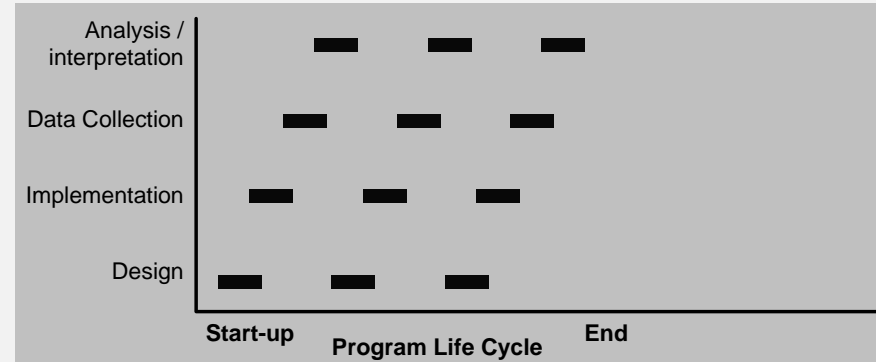**Retooling program theory**

Agile methodology

Data choices

Framework 2: Program X Evaluation Life Cycles

Multiple, short term studies
- Continuous process improvement
- Short time between cause and effect = inference with simpler methodology
- Inherently sensitive to surprise

1:1 Correspondence between life cycles
- Fog of start up
- Surprise late in program life cycle can force early stage evaluation redesign
- *Gets worse when design and data requirements must be stable over time*
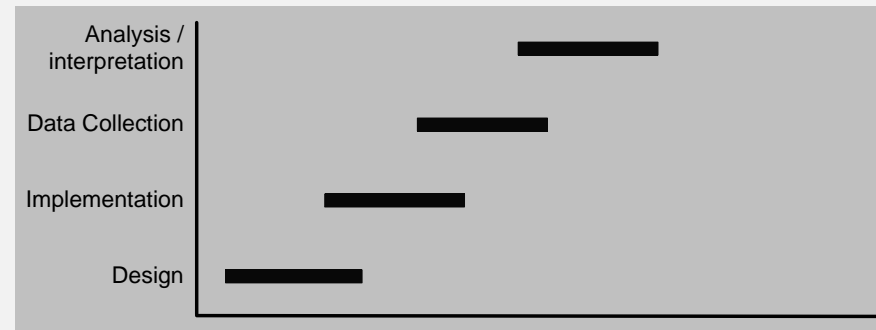
Retrospective focus
- Emphasis on program in stable part of life cycle
- Program change, evolution relatively unimportant

Framework 3: Social/Organizational Sources of Surprise
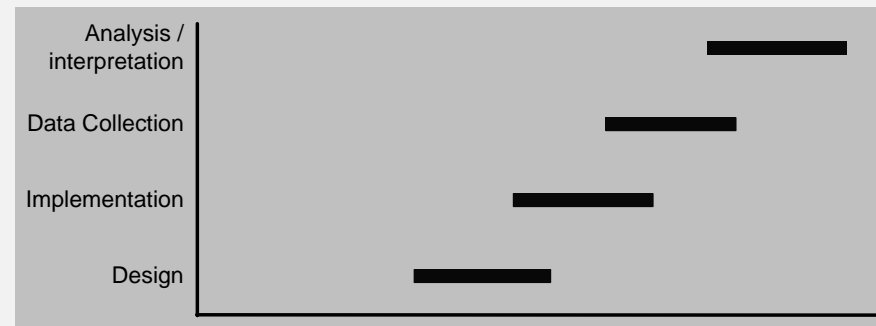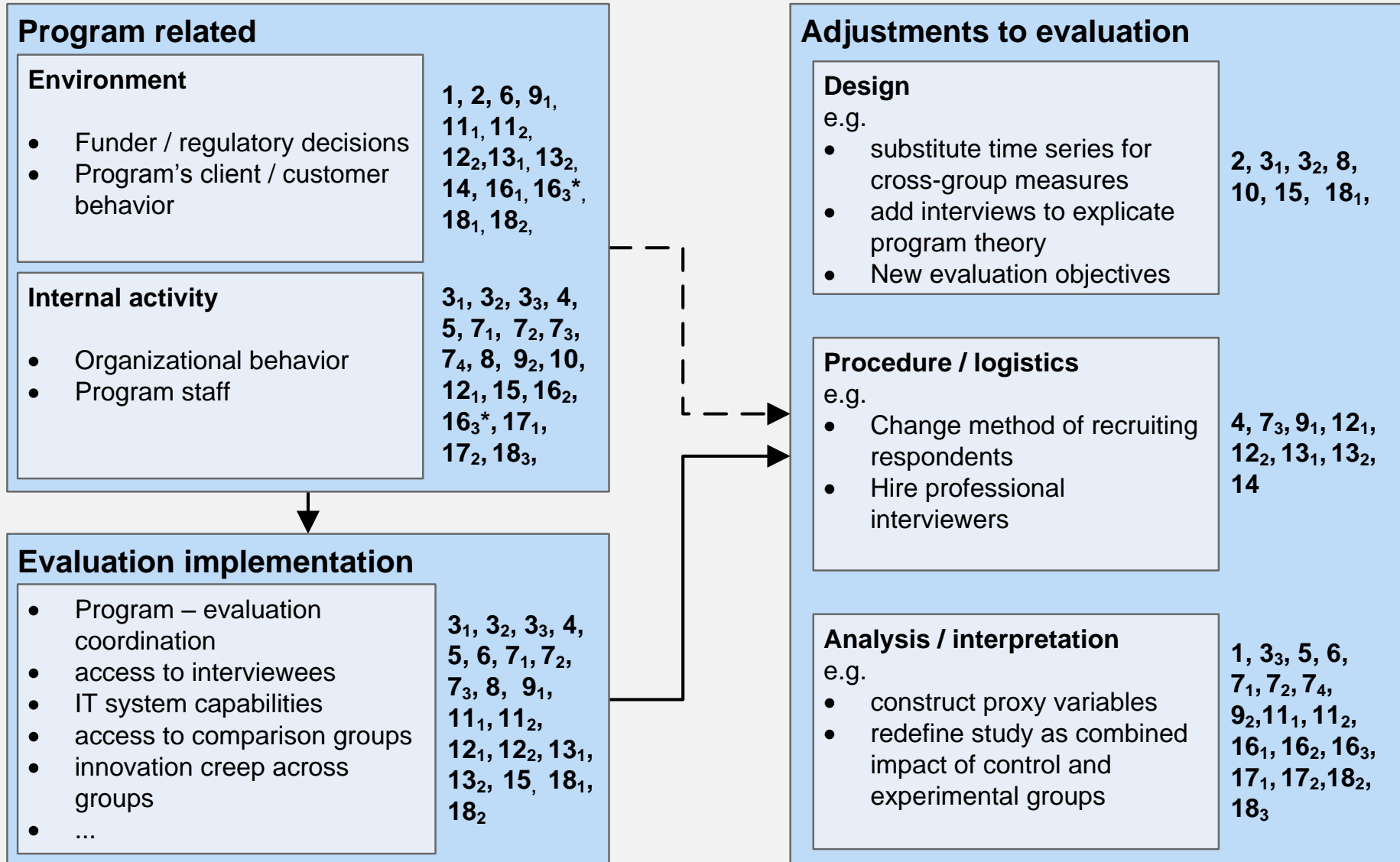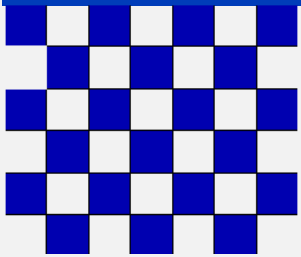
Program related

Environment

- Funder / regulatory decisions
- Program's client / customer behavior

1, 2, 6, 9_1, 11_1, 11_2, 12_2, 13_1, 13_2, 14, 16_1, 16_3*, 18_1, 18_2,

Internal activity

- Organizational behavior
- Program staff

3_1, 3_2, 3_3, 4, 5, 7_1, 7_2, 7_3, 7_4, 8, 9_2, 10, 12_1, 15, 16_2, 16_3*, 17_1, 17_2, 18_3,

Evaluation implementation

- Program – evaluation coordination
- access to interviewees
- IT system capabilities
- access to comparison groups
- innovation creep across groups
- ...

3_1, 3_2, 3_3, 4, 5, 6, 7_1, 7_2, 7_3, 8, 9_1, 11_1, 11_2, 12_1, 12_2, 13_1, 13_2, 15, 18_1, 18_2

Adjustments to evaluation

Design
e.g.
- substitute time series for cross-group measures
- add interviews to explicate program theory
- New evaluation objectives

2, 3_1, 3_2, 8, 10, 15, 18_1,

Procedure / logistics
e.g.
- Change method of recruiting respondents
- Hire professional interviewers

4, 7_3, 9_1, 12_1, 12_2, 13_1, 13_2, 14

Analysis / interpretation
e.g.
- construct proxy variables
- redefine study as combined impact of control and experimental groups

1, 3_3, 5, 6, 7_1, 7_2, 7_4, 9_2, 11_1, 11_2, 16_1, 16_2, 16_3, 17_1, 17_2, 18_2, 18_3

Examples of Problems Along the Continuum

Foreseeable

Unforeseeable

Respect Data.   *Trust judgment.*
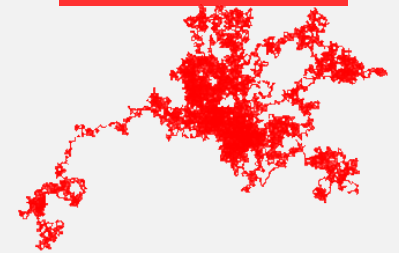
From case studies		
Clinic user fees – Niger	Tight integration, evaluation and service delivery	Refugee resettlement

From development → democracy example		
Disease specific vs. health system improvement	Interactions among development programs can be ignored	Abrupt change in donor foreign aid policy

Evaluation Tactics to Solve the Problem

Foreseeable
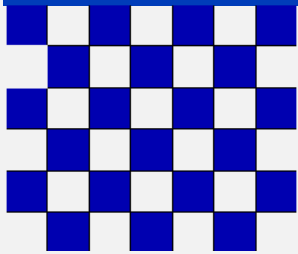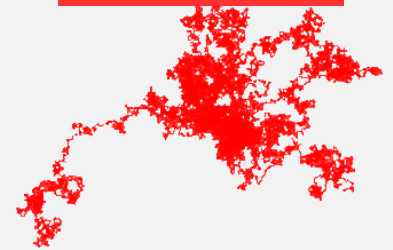
Unforeseeable

Respect Data.

Trust judgment.

Problem		
Disease specific vs. health system improvement	Interactions among development programs can be ignored	Abrupt change in donor foreign aid policy

One possible solution		
Theory / experience	Expanded use of M&E / leading indicators	Regular interviews to determine policy changes and consequences

For More on Evaluating in the Face of Uncertainty…

Why Are There Unintended Consequences of Program Action, and What Are the Implications for Doing Evaluation?

Jonathan A. Morell, *American Journal of Evaluation 2005 26: 444*

Evaluation in the Face of Uncertainty: *Anticipating Surprise and Responding to the Inevitable*

Jonathan A. Morell, Guilford Publications 2010

Jonny Morell's blog: www.evaluationuncertainty.com

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